

The Rail Gunner Weekly

41st Fires Brigade



1-21 FA



2-20 FA



589th BSB



HHB

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CHARLIE, *cont'd* 2

Homeward bound 3

589th BSB awards 3

RG 6,7 say thanks 4

Btry. C heads home 5



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A commander's look back: Charlie Battery 1-21 FA



Capt. Robert Plowey and 1st Sgt. Michael Bey pose for a picture with "Flat Stanley." Plowey and Bey served together through most of Btry. C's deployment, until Plowey assumed command of HHB, 41st Fires Bde., in May 2009.

Photo courtesy of Btry. C, 1-21 FA

By Sgt. 1st Class Joe Thompson
41st Fires Bde. PAO

Fifteen months after deploying to Iraq, the Soldiers of Battery C, 1st Battalion, 21st Field Artillery Regiment, 41st Fires Brigade are back home at Fort Hood, Texas.

From Bucca to Buehring, Basra to Delta, the Soldiers of Btry. C have had an adventure of a deployment.

Starting at Camp Bucca in April 2008, the Soldiers of Btry. C's first mission in Iraq was conducting detainee operations

"Basically what we did at Camp Bucca was set up vocational schools, we supported the Islamic discussion group, we helped run a brick factory, we ran an art school and a general knowledge school known as the Bucca Enrichment School which focused on math and reading and writing and Arabic," said Capt. Robert Plowey, then commander of Btry. C, 1st Bn., 21st FA Regt.

The goal was to give the detainees the skills needed through the rehabilitation process so that when they

left the detainment facility they could become productive members of society.

The time at Camp Bucca for Btry. C was short lived. After two months conducting detainee operations, the unit received a maneuver mission: conducting security patrols, escorting international police advisors and supporting the police transition teams in Basra.

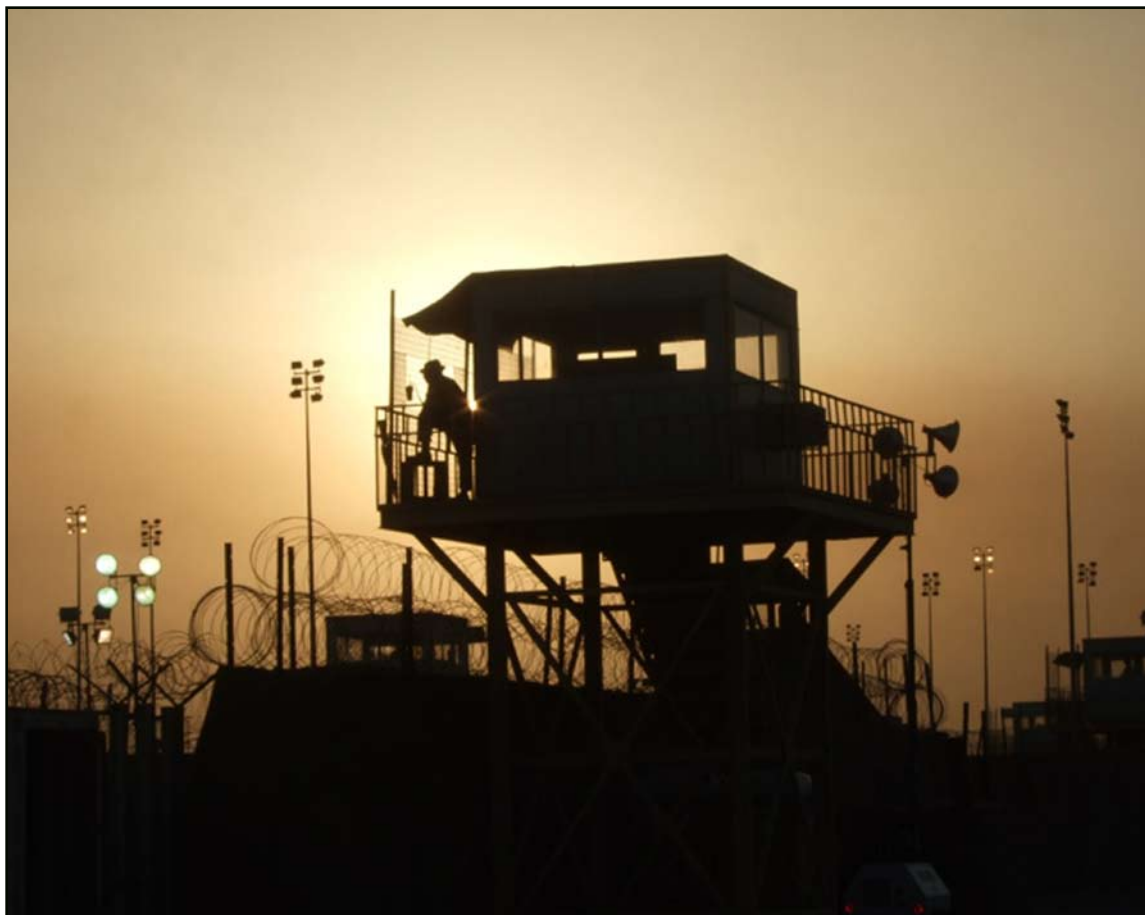
After training at Camp Buehring in Kuwait, Btry. C went to Camp Basra and partnered with the British Soldiers stationed there. Although the living conditions were unique in themselves, after living in 70-man tents at Camp Buehring, the Soldiers had some semblance of privacy and a place to call their own.

"The living areas that we lived in were known as coffins. It was maybe four-by-eight living area surrounded by cinder block with a mattress on the ground amongst the cinder block with an overhead cover consisting of a steel plate, a Kevlar plate and then sandbags," described Plowey, from Pittsburgh.

"It was quite a change for the Soldiers, however now they had their own personal space. And that's

Please see CHARLIE, page 2

CHARLIE, cont'd from page 1



A Soldier pulls guard duty at Camp Bucca, where Btry. C was initially deployed on April 2008 to conduct detainee operations before they received a change of mission to go to Basra to conduct a maneuver mission.

Photo courtesy of Btry. C, 1-21 FA

what everybody was excited about, a space to call their own," he added.

The Basra mission was split up between the headquarters and 1st Platoon at Camp Basra, 3rd Platoon at Camp Steelback and 4th Platoon at the Old State Building Combat Outpost. While this was going on 2nd Platoon had gone to Taji to attend the Phoenix Academy for additional training and then onto FOB Delta to provide escort for the Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team.

"We went from nothing to a fully functional maneuver battery with two different types of MRAPs, the Caimans and the MaxPros, a full fleet of 1151 Humvees and ASVs, the Military Police Armed Security Vehicle, all outfitted with the communications equipment, all the crew served weapon systems, the Blue Force Trackers that we needed and also the EWO devices we needed to accomplish the mission," said Plowey.

Besides getting the equipment to accomplish the mission, the Soldiers also improved their living conditions, the worst being at the Old State Building Combat Outpost.

"There was no internet, no phone, no DFAC facility, and the Soldiers were basically showering off a blivot bag," said Plowey.

"I remember looking the Soldiers in the

eyes and telling them what their mission was...I knew what they were thinking, they were thinking I was crazy, but giving them this mission, having them occupy this area I knew that they would take ownership of it and make it their own."

"The way that I do business it that you lead from the front, bottom line. I did the recon with the platoon leader and we went out there, we walked the walk and we stayed in that environment before we put the Soldiers in it. I've never asked a Soldier to do anything that I haven't done myself, and I never will," said Plowey.

After almost eight months in Basra, Btry. C received another change in mission: join the 41st Fires Brigade at FOB Delta.

"It was quite an intense process because we had to get rid of all the equipment that we had acquired, which is how I got very well acquainted with the TPE process, which set me up for success now to mentor other officers and Soldiers with our current relief-in-place at FOB Delta," said Plowey.

Shortly after arriving at FOB Delta, Plowey received a change in mission for himself: give up the reigns of Btry. C, and assume command of the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 41st Fires Brigade. Plowey assumed command

of HHB in May. Btry. C became the movement and escort element for the Wasit PRT.

"The command philosophy I had at Charlie Battery is that you are only as strong as your brothers on your left and right; we're a family and we must take care of each other. The positive things that we achieve or the negative things that we fail on, it's because of everyone around us, it's not because of one particular person, it's all of us and we are all in this together," said Plowey.

Plowey also emphasized that Btry. C succeeded in every mission that they undertook because of the Soldiers in his formation.

"We could not have accomplished what we did if we acted as individuals, every Soldier in the formation contributed to our success; 1st. Sgt. Bey and I could not have accomplished anything if our Soldiers didn't believe in us and support us wholeheartedly," said Plowey.

For Plowey, his respect and confidence in the professional noncommissioned officers that he worked with, both at Btry. C and HHB was instrumental to

his and his units' successes.

"1st Sgt. Bey taught me a huge thing about a lot of NCOs, especially as a young officer. He said to pick an NCO and emulate that NCO and talk to him and learn as much as you can from them and use them as a sounding board, and if you do that what happens is that you look up to that NCO and when I was in Charlie Battery, that NCO was 1st Sgt. Michael Bey," said Plowey.

As Btry. C winds down and begins to redeploy, Plowey acknowledged that 15 months is a long time to be away from your family and that it is very hard missing the milestones of your life while deployed.

"I want to thank my wife for everything; I wouldn't be able to do anything without her. The way that she supports me and the way that she is able to handle the things at home, I couldn't be more grateful, more proud or love anyone so much, so I want to thank her for everything and for understanding that I not only have a family at home but I have a family out here too," said Plowey.

Battery C deployed in April 2008 and returned in July. 41st Fires Brigade deployed in June 2008 and will be returning home in July and August.

Torch, MND-S augmentees take first step home



Top left, right: Col. Dick Francey, 41st Fires Brigade commander, says goodbye to Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 41st Fires Brigade, as they get on the plane to Kuwait July 10. The Soldiers served as augmentees to 10th Mountain Division in Baghdad for most of their deployment before rejoining the brigade at FOB Delta.

*Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Joe Thompson
41st Fires Bde. PAO*



Left: Maj. E.J. Karlberg (right), 41st Fires Bde. executive officer, makes his way on to the aircraft July 7. Right: Command Sgt. Maj. Kelvin Hughes, 41st Fires Bde. and former 1-21 FA senior enlisted leader, says farewell July 7 to Capt. Robert Plowey, who took command of HHB, 41st Fires Bde., after six years in 1-21 FA.

*Photos by
Sgt. Allison Churchill
41st Fires Bde. PAO*



Worship Opportunities Sunday

Chapel 1

Traditional Protestant	0900
Latter-day Saints	1030
Gospel Service	1300

Tuesday

Mayor Cell

Bible Study	1930
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Chapel 1

Liturgy of the Word (Catholic service)	1930
Bible Study	2000

Thursday

TMC

Bible Study	1930
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Saturday

Chapel 1

Christian Movie Night	2000
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Iron Caissons give, receive awards



Above: 589th Brigade Support Battalion leaders Command Sgt. Maj. Eric Taylor and Lt. Col. Ina Yahn present awards to Kellogg, Brown and Root and other civilian contractors.

*Photo courtesy of
Capt. David Stevens*

Right: Brig. Gen. Gerald Lang (right), Multi-National Division -- South deputy commanding general (support), presents the Army Industrial Operations Safety Award, Battalion, to Yahn and Taylor July 7, who were notified 589th BSB had won the award in April.



Photo by Sgt. Allison Churchill, 41st Fires Bde. PAO

Rail Gunner leaders continue appreciation tour

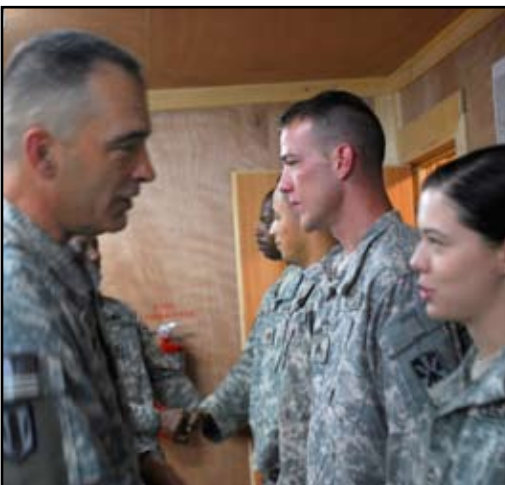


Left: Command Sgt. Maj. Kelvin Hughes and Col. Dick Francey, the 41st Fires Brigade command team, present coins to Soldiers in Operational Detachment Alpha 5216, 5th Group, in the brigade conference room July 10.
Right: Hughes and Francey show their appreciation to the 32nd Iraqi Army Brigade Military Transition Team, "Team Lucky" July 10.

Left: Command Sgt. Maj. Kelvin Hughes, 41st Fires Brigade, gives a Soldier on the FOB Delta Military Working Dog team a thank-you handshake July 10.
Right: Col. Dick Francey, 41st Fires Brigade commander, presents coins to the FOB Delta Explosive Ordnance Disposal team July 10.



*Photos by
Sgt. 1st Class
Joe Thompson
41st Fires Bde. PAO*



Top left: Col. Dick Francey speaks to the Federal Police Training Team before presenting coins to the Soldiers July 8.
Top Middle: Francey presents coins to Soldiers in FOB Delta's Tactical Psychological Operations Teams and 303rd Military Intelligence Battalion.
Top Right: Francey says thanks to the team on FOB Delta from 287th Sustainment Brigade.
Bottom left: Francey and Command Sgt. Maj. Kelvin Hughes show gratitude to the Counter-Rocket and Mortar Sense and Warn Team, Company E, 4th Battalion, 5th Air Defense Artillery.
Bottom Right: Francey speaks to Soldiers in the 151st Target Acquisition Battery.

*Photos by Sgt. Allison Churchill
41st Fires Bde. PAO*



Battery C, 1-21 FA redeploys after 15 months

By Sgt. 1st Class Joe Thompson
41st Fires Bde. PAO

Soldiers from Battery C, 1st Battalion, 21st Field Artillery Regiment, 41st Fires Brigade headed to Kuwait from FOB Delta, finishing up their 15 month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom July 10.

"The guys did all right; I got to hand it to them," said Sgt. 1st Class Steve Robitaille, Operations Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Btry. C.

"Looking back it's just a blur, just one long blur. The biggest thing we did was re-mission from a field artillery battery to our [police training team] and [military transition team] operations down in Basra and it worked out extremely well," said Robitaille, from Lewiston, Maine.

From hugging the wife and kids, calling Mom and Dad or having that first drink, the Soldiers from Btry. C are ready to go home after 15 months and three different missions in Iraq.

"The only thing I am going to miss from this place is all the good times and memories I had with the guys," said Spc. Pete Kniskern, from Birmingham, Ala.

Battery C started its deployment in April 2008 at Camp Bucca conducting detainee operations. Then the unit went to Camp Buehring, Kuwait, retraining for a maneuver mission in Basrah. After almost eight months in Basrah, the unit ended up at FOB Delta, escorting the Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team.

For Sgt. Alex Williams, this was his second tour in Iraq and he said that there has been a lot of improvement from his last time here.



Col. Dick Francey, 41st Fires Brigade commander, shakes hands with the first Soldier to board the airplane taking Btry. C, 1st Bn., 21st FA Regt., to Kuwait as the battery redeploys from FOB Delta to Fort Hood, Texas July 10.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Joe Thompson, 41st Fires Bde. PAO

"Things are getting better outside the wire; there's more security and things have calmed down a lot," said Williams, from Colorado Springs, Colo.

"I'd say a 180 from last time I was here; there's less violence and you can tell the people are starting to do a lot more for themselves in both the economy and they are starting to

govern themselves better. They've come a long way in the last three to four years," added Williams.

The rest of the Soldiers in 41st Fires Brigade are continuing the redeployment process throughout the rest of July with the entire brigade scheduled to be back in Fort Hood, Texas, by early August.



Left: Known as "coffins" to the Soldiers that lived in them, Btry. C Soldiers spent the majority of their deployment under these living conditions at Camp Basra from July 2008 until April 2009.



Right: Sgt. 1st Class Steve Robitaille, Operations Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Btry. C, shakes 41st Fires Brigade commander Col. Dick Francey's hand as he waits in line to board the aircraft that will take him to Kuwait July 10.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Joe Thompson, 41st Fires Bde. PAO

Photo courtesy of Btry. C, 1-21 FA